Tips to Informal Caregivers
on Giving Personal Care

Body Mechanics and Lifting

Before lifting a person, caregivers should review the principles of body mechanics with a trained health care professional. Often your local home health agency, American Red Cross or Area Agency on Aging have videotape guides or access to professionals to assist you with learning proper techniques of body mechanics.

Good posture should be maintained at all times: head erect, buttocks pulled in, stomach muscles tight, chest high and shoulders pulled back. Use a wide base of support, with feet apart and one foot forward when standing for a long period of time. The broader and the base of support, the lower the center of gravity and the easier it is to maintain balance.

Keep the back straight and the knees and hips flexed. When reaching down to lift an object, use the leg's large muscles for strength. Never bend from the waist to pick up or move a person. Work with gravity, not against it. Point the feet in the direction of the movement for side and forward motion. This prevents twisting of the spine and allows movement with the body in good alignment.

Stay close to the person to conserve energy and prevent strain. Work at waist level if possible.

Comfort and position are important to the bedridden person. Comfort is increased by aligning the person's body correctly in normal contours.

Procedure

- Give support to the curves of the spine with a pillow under the head and neck; the pillow should reach down to the shoulder.
- Place a small flat pad, such as a rolled towel, under the small of the back.
- Support body joints using pillows, folded towels and wash cloths.

- Legs should be supported to relieve pressure on hip joints with a small pillow or pad placed under the person's ankles and knees to prevent pressure on heels and legs. If the person cannot move himself, change his position at least every hour. This helps to:

  - improve circulation
  - improve muscle tone
  - prevent joint deformities
  - provide some diversion
  - prevent pressure sores
  - prevent strain and fatigue

A person, when confined to bed, often experiences a tremendous emotional upset brought on by inactivity and dependence. Help the person express his feelings. Encourage and praise him whenever possible.

The above statements are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. You should always consult with your physician about any health and lifestyle concerns or issues you may have.